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Driven Mad by the Sea Serpent: The strange case of Captain George Drevar

C. G. M. Paxton

In 1881 George Drevar, a merchant captain who had survived a shipwreck in the Cape Verde Islands, was tried at the Old Bailey for libel and threatening the life of the Commissioner of Wreck, Henry Cadogan Rothery, in part because of a disagreement over the existence of the great sea serpent. This article explains the background to the trial, including Drevar's own sea serpent sightings, the trial's eventual outcome and some later related events in Drevar's life. Drevar's actions seem to have been driven by mental illness caused by the stress of shipwreck coupled with a fervent religiosity with regard to the sea serpent.

Key words: sea serpents, cryptozoology, sea monsters, eyewitness testimony, *Pauline*, *Norfolk*, mental health, sperm whales

In May 1881 a rather curious case came before the Central Criminal Court (the Old Bailey) in London.[1] Captain George Drevar of the merchant marine was accused of sending threatening letters to the Commissioner of Wreck, Mr Henry Cadogan Rothery, who had presided over an inquest into the grounding of the ship *Norfolk*, captained and possibly part-owned by Drevar, in 1879 on Hartwell Reef, off Boa Vista, in the Cape Verde Islands, which had resulted in the suspension of Drevar's captain's licence.[2] Drevar seems to have strongly resented the outcome of the enquiry, which he regarded as unfair. But the outcome of the wreck enquiry was not Drevar's sole bone of contention with the commissioner.

> Some evidence was given showing that the prisoner believed in the existence of the sea serpent, and the prisoner himself stated that his conduct had been partly induced by the insults he had received from Mr Rothery, because he 'was doing the Almighty's work in making his wonders known'.[3]

Drevar was clearly under great strain in this period, exacerbated by the fact the *Norfolk* was (possibly) uninsured. He proceeded, rather unwisely, to harass the commissioner by sending letters which apparently threatened Rothery with murder.[4] Naturally, after a while, such activity came to the attention of the authorities.

1 *The Times*, 7 May 1881.
2 Rothery, 'Norfolk', *Board of Trade Wreck Report* 119-121.
3 *The Times*, 26. Apr. 1881; *Nottingham Evening Post*, 26 Apr. 1881.
4 *The Times*, 12 Apr. 1881.

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Notwithstanding his threats of murder, Drevar's belief in the great sea serpent was not wholly irrational for he had seen one, twice, experiences which appear to have aroused such passions in him to lead to the Old Bailey.

This article explores the curious and little-known case of Drevar, which has never, to the author's knowledge, been fully told. The origin of his obsession with sea serpents is discussed and different explanations for his sea serpent encounters are assessed. The circumstances and outcome of his trial are detailed, as far as can be known, and his subsequent biography is discussed in so far as it relates to his biological interests.

Sea serpents in the late nineteenth century

Great sea serpents (hereafter just 'sea serpents', as opposed to the scientifically recognized bona fide small sea snakes of the family Hydrophidae) have been reported since antiquity.[5] By the mid- to late nineteenth century, many scientists were sceptical about the existence of giant sea serpents but authors of popular science/natural history were more sympathetic.[6] Sea serpents were serpentiform, that is serpent-shaped, but this did not necessarily mean they were thought to be actual snakes and there were debates as to what animals great sea serpents would be if they actually existed.

Before the sea serpent

An incomplete account of Drevar's life was given in the *Australian Star* in 1888.[7] He is described both as 54 and 64 years old on his death in 1890 but was apparently 48 when tried in 1881.[8] Drevar by his own account first went to sea in 1848 and so must have been between 12 and 22 years old.[9] He is described by *The Times* in 1876 as a 'scotchman', but no record of a relevant George Drevar in the National Records of Scotland can be found. [10] A George Drevar, born in Dublin in 1833, who became an apprentice in 1849 and who received his second- and first-mate certificates in 1856 and 1857 respectively, may be the same man. By 1855, by his own account in 1888, Drevar was a second mate and subsequently had his first experience of shipwreck. He was stranded for six months on the island of Agalega in the Mauritius group.[11] The wrecked vessel appears to have been the *Margaret* which was reported by the *Mauritius Commercial Gazette* of 23 January 1856 as being 'recently' wrecked in Agalega.[12] He then 'commanded a brig on the Australian coast named after myself' between 1862 and 1863.[13] By late 1863, he was in England and he took the *Shamrock* (only 28 tons register apparently) from Plymouth to Cuba. In 1864 he was master

5 See Heuvelmans, *In the Wake of the Sea-serpents* for a history.

6 See, for example, *The Times,* 14 Nov. 1848 and 12 Jan. 1893; Gosse, *The Romance of Natural History* and Wilson, *Leisure Time Studies*.

7 *Australian Star*, 23 Jan. 1888.

8 *Evening News (Sydney)*, 3 Jan. 1890; *Brisbane Courier,* 7 Jan. 1890; *The Times*, 7 May 1881.

9 *Australian Star*, 23 Jan. 1888.

10 *The Times*, 16 Sep. 1876.

11 *Australian Star*, 23 Jan. 1888.

12 *Adelaide Times*, 10 Mar. 1856.

13 *Australian Star*, 23 Jan. 1888.

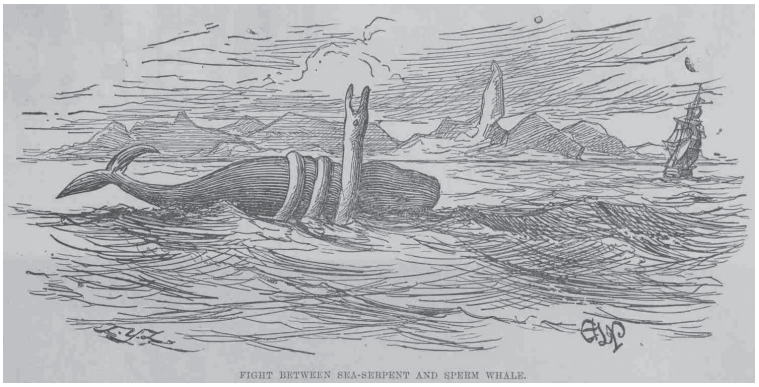

Figure 1 Navy chaplain E. L. Penny's drawing of the 'Pauline' encounter as it appeared in the 'Illustrated London News' on 20 November 1875

of the *Deva* out of Wangaroa, Australia.[14] By 1870 he commanded the *Como* 'which foundered in mid-ocean' because of shifting cargo, causing the crew to abandon ship.[15]

Captain of the 'Pauline'

By June 1871 Drevar was captain of the *Pauline*, an American-built barque of 587 tons, principal owner G. C. Trufant.[16] In the summer of 1875 the *Pauline* left Newcastle en route for Zanzibar with a cargo of coal for HMS *London*.[17] This required crossing the Atlantic, presumably to take advantage of the north-easterly trade winds, so in July 1875 the *Pauline* found itself off the coast of Cape Sao Roque, Brazil where it encountered the great sea serpent.

The earliest published account of the encounter occurs on 17 November 1875 when *The Scotsman* quoted the Zanzibar correspondent of the *Western Morning News* that the *Pauline* had arrived in Zanzibar in October and the crew had spoken to naval officers there and they 'were convinced of the truth of the story'.[18] A fuller account, albeit second-hand, comes in a letter and sketch sent to the *Illustrated London News* by Reverend E. L. Penny, chaplain to HMS *London* who had met the crew of the *Pauline* on their arrival in Zanzibar (figure 1). He may well have been the 'Zanzibar correspondent' of the previous report who was stated to be a naval officer.

THE GREAT SEA-SERPENT

> Our Engraving is an exact representation of a sketch we have received, with the following letter from the Rev. E. L. Penny, M. A., Chaplain to H. M. S. London, at Zanzibar, Oct. 21 :- "I send you herewith a sketch of the great sea-serpent attacking a sperm whale, which I have made from the descriptions of the captain and crew of the barque Pauline, and they have, after careful examination, pronounced it to be correct. The whale should have been placed deeper in the

14 *The South Australian Advertiser*, 1 Mar. 1864
15 *Shipping and Mercantile Gazette,* 1 Dec. 1870; *Australian Star*, 23 Jan. 1888.
16 *Shipping and Mercantile Gazette*, 9 Jun. 1871; *Lloyd's Register of Shipping*, 1874.
17 Drevar, *The Great Sea Serpent and Sperm Whale Conflict*.
18 *The Scotsman*, 17 Nov. 1875.

water, but I should then have been unable to depict so clearly the manner in which the animal was attacked."

"Captain Drevar, of the barque Pauline, bound with coals for her Majesty's naval stores at Zanzibar, when in lat. 5 deg. 13 min. S., long. 35 deg. W., on July 8 last, observed three very large sperm whales, and one of them was gripped round the body, with two turns, by what appeared to be a huge serpent. Its back was of a darkish brown and its belly white, with an immense head and mouth, the latter always open; the head and tail had a length beyond the coils about 30 ft. ; its girth was about 8 ft. or 9 ft . . .

"On July 13 this or another sea-serpent was again seen, about 200 yards off the stern of the vessel, shooting itself along the surface, 40 ft of its body being out of the water at a time. Again on the same day, it was seen once more, with its body standing quite perpendicular out of the water to the height of 60 ft. This time it seemed as if determined to attack the vessel and the crew and officers armed themselves for self-defence. Captain Drevar is a singularly able and observant man, and those of his crew and officers with whom I conversed were singularly intelligent ; not did any of their descriptions vary from one to another in the least – there were no discrepancies."

This second report agrees with original report except the former stated interestingly that the crew and officers disagreed over the girth where they say the girth was 3 to 4 feet 'with some imagining it larger'.

If the *Pauline* was 20 miles off the coast (as a subsequent account would have it, see below), the coast would not be so readily visible in the image. The coastline is rather more reminiscent of the rocky outline of the island of Fernando de Noronha at 3° 52' S. 32° 28' W or St Paul's rocks at 0° 55' N. 29 20' W, rather than the low-relief coastline of Cape Sao Roque.

On 22 November 1877 several newspapers gave a second-hand account that 'J. H. Lundells' or 'Londells' (in fact Landells), the second officer, had confirmed the report by letter.[19] The letter was ultimately reprinted in the *Cornish Telegraph,* among other newspapers.

Mr. Landells says: ". . . There were several whales altogether, perhaps four or five. They were all large ones, and the largest one was victim in this case. The animal was completely in the toils [*sic*] of the tremendous serpent. It had two complete turns round the body of the whale in the thickest part, and had it completely in its (the serpent's) power. The whale was in an agony either of pain or terror, perhaps both, and was continually throwing itself half out of water.

Judging the whale forty feet in circumference, we estimate the serpent to be 150 feet long. Our theory is that this animal swallows the whale just as boa constrictor does a buffalo; and is actually the more reasonable idea, supposing they were equally dubious. I must finish by saying that we think it not improbable that this is the 'great leviathan' spoken of by Job. Read the account of it as given in the book of Job, and you have the best idea the animal is possible to gain from paper. [20]

19 *Belfast Telegraph,* 22 Nov. 1875.
20 *Cornish Telegraph*, 24 Nov. 1875.

The next published first first-hand account of the *Pauline* sea serpent was given in the *Shields Daily News* and is by Drevar himself. Like Landells' account, he only mentions the one encounter.

THE SEA SERPENT

The following letter has been sent to the Shipping Gazette by Captain George Drevar of the Barque Pauline from Zanzibar: –SIM – On July 8, 1875, in lat. 5° 13 N [*sic*, it should be south], long. 35 W., Cape San Roque north-east coast of Brazils, bearing W.S.W., distance about 20 miles, at 11 A.M., the weather fine and clear, wind and sea moderate, about one-half mile to windward, we observed some black spots on the water, and a whitish pillar, about 30 feet high, above them. The sea was also splashing up fountain-like several hundred yards around them. At first glance I thought they were breakers, and the pillar a pinnacle rock bleached with the sun; but the pillar fell with a splash, and rose and fell frequently. Good glasses showed me that it was a monster sea snake coiled twice around the body of a large sperm whale, the head and tail part of the snake, each about 30 feet long forming a lever, crushing its victim to death with each revolution, and appearing, as each portion alternatively rose in the air, like the arms of some gigantic windmill, and about the same speed as it would do in a fresh breeze. They both sank about every two minutes, remaining that time under water, and then coming to the surface, both still revolving. The struggle of the whale, and two other whales near at hand lashing the water frantic with excitement, made the sea in their vicinity like a boiling cauldron, and the confused noise was distinctly heard. The struggle lasted about fifteen minutes and finished with the tail portion of the whale elevated straight into the air, waving backwards and forwards, and the tail furiously lashing the water in the last death struggle as it disappeared from our view, and, sinking down head foremost, no doubt was soon gorged at the monster's leisure, and the huge mouthful may at this moment be in the process of digestion, and the monster of monsters in a dormant state. Two of the largest sperm whales I have seen came slowly towards of vessel, their bodies were more than usually elevated out of the water. They were not blowing or making a noise, but seemed quite paralysed from the fearful sight; indeed a cold shiver passed through my frame on witnessing the last agonising struggle of the poor whale, which seemed as helpless in the coils of the serpent as a small bird in the talons of a hawk. Allowing for the two turns around the whale, I think the snake was about 160 feet long and seven or eight feet in the girth. In colour and shape it was like a conger eel. The First and Second Mates and half of the Crew were observers, and I intend, with them, to appear before some authority and testify on the oath the above statement is true.

I am aware that few believe in the existence of the great sea serpent. People think that it should be oftener seen by the numerous vessels always on the ocean; but the north coast of Brazil, noted for its monster reptiles, is also particularly adapted to the growth of sea monsters. It is in mid-torrid zone; the temperature of the water and air seldom below 81 deg; the shore for a thousand miles is bordered by a coral wall or Receife, and numerous banks or reefs lie a considerable distance off the land . . . It may also be allowed that the serpent retains some portion of cunning mentioned in the Scriptures; at least, he shows

> wit enough not to leave a secure home and go meandering about the ocean like other fish, to be captured and tortured for men's pleasure or profit. No doubt San Roque is a good feeding ground, it being a landmark for whales leaving the south for the North Atlantic and the warm currents suitable for breeding.[21]

Other second-hand accounts were made, some of which (for example that in the *Daily Telegraph*) were dismissed by Drevar in his 1889 pamphlet as being inaccurate.[22] Drevar then apparently released a statement to the *Englishman* (Calcutta)[23] It has not been possible to locate this directly, but the *Dublin Evening Telegraph* gives a report from an 'Indian paper' supplied by Drevar himself who had just arrived in Cork which agrees with an abbreviated version of the *Englishman* article published in a book in 1883.[24]. This is a fulsome version with all the material of Drevar's first-hand account above with a lot more commentary which, like Landells' account, makes reference to the serpent being the Leviathan of the book of Job.

The sea serpent account seems to have raised the profile of Drevar such that in August 1876 the *Times* correspondent in Akyab (now Sittwe), Burma (Myanmar), encountered Drevar and found him 'a shrewd, hard headed scotchman' and the crew of the *Pauline* 'a more respectable body of men than the average of merchant crews are now'.[25]

No more details were forthcoming until 10 and 11 January 1877, when several newspapers published details of an affidavit (of less detail than the previously given reports) sworn before the magistrate T. S. Raffles in Liverpool after the *Pauline* arrived in Liverpool, given by the following personnel: Drevar, Horatio Thompson, Landells, Owen Baker and William Lewarn. Of the second sighting, the affidavit just says the captain and one ordinary seaman saw it. Then, of the final sighting, it says it was seen by the chief officer and three able seamen of whom two gave their names: Thompson and Lewarn. It was further stated that

> Captain Drevar states that several scientific bodies in London, some time ago, expressed a desire to see him when at his leisure, in order to obtain from him all the information at his disposal. This is the first time he has had the opportunity of disclosing his observations, and for that purpose he intends to proceed to London during the week.[26]

The affidavit, with slight alterations, was also reprinted by Drevar in 1889.[27] The accounts were widely reprinted in newspapers despite the account being year-old news previously reprinted. There is no record of Drevar addressing any scientific societies in this time although he corresponded with some scientists notably Philip H. Gosse (the author of *The Romance of Natural History*) in 1877 and later Albert Günther, curator at the Natural History Museum, 'after I settled in London', so

21 *Shields Daily News*, 29 Nov. 1875.
22 *Daily Telegraph & Courier,* 22 Nov. 1875.
23 Drevar, *The Great Sea Serpent and Sperm Whale Conflict.*
24 *Dublin Evening Telegraph*, 2 Jan. 1877; Gould, *Mythical Monsters*
25 *The Times*, 16 Sep. 1876.
26 *Liverpool Mercury*, 11 Jan. 1877.
27 Drevar, *The Great Sea Serpent and Sperm Whale Conflict.*

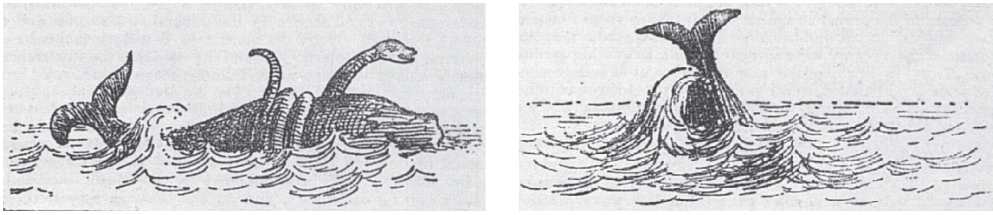

Figure 2 Drevar's own sketches of the 'Pauline' sea serpent from the 'Graphic', 27 January 1877

presumably the period 1880–2.[28]

Later in the month, courtesy of *The Graphic,* we get Drevar's own sketches of the *Pauline* incident (figure 2).[29] A final account of the sea serpent encounters was a privately published booklet by Drevar from 1889, which also describes the encounter in words almost the same as the original Indian account.[30] The encounter is now 11 miles off the cape, the serpent is now 8 or 9 feet in girth and 160 to 170 ft in estimated total length. Urcas Rocks of the newspaper account are now identified as Urca de Monohota (now Urca Minoto) off the north-east coast of Brazil.

Drevar made another comment on his sighting around 1883 in a letter to the naturalist Henry Lee, the author of *Sea Monsters Unmasked:*

> You may rely on my report as strictly true, and in no way exaggerated. I called the second officer out of his bed to witness the conflict, and he remarked at the time that had the occurrence been further off he would have concluded that it was a sword-fish and a thrasher [*sic*, presumably a thresher shark is meant] fighting a whale, which he thought he saw on his first voyage to sea. Several shipmasters told me that they had seen the same conflict near the locality that I saw it, but had not been close enough to see the coils; they thought it was two separate fish fighting the whale, but were satisfied that it might have been the head and tail portion of a huge serpent about the whale.[31]

Subsequent zoological comment on what Drevar reported varied. The descriptions are a little contradictory. The serpent was a white pillar but also dark above and similar in colour to a conger eel, which is countershaded (i.e. coloured dark in the dorsal surface and lighter on the ventral surface). If the *Pauline* was 20 miles off Cape Sao Roque, it might have been just over the continental shelf edge in the deep water of the South Atlantic. Therefore the sperm whale could have been feeding on the giant squid *Architeuthis.* The coils of the sea serpent would be the arms or tentacles of *Architeuthis.* This would be reconcilable with 'arms of a gigantic windmill'. However, the tentacles of *Architeuthis* do not reach a length of 150 ft.[32] This suggestion was originally made by naturalist Henry Lee in 1883 and would explain the reported countershading.[33] However, if the *Pauline* was only 11 miles off the coast then it would be on the shelf and therefore unlikely, but not impossible, for

28 *London Evening Standard*, 14 Aug. 1883.
29 *The Graphic*, 27 Jan. 1877.
30 Drevar, *The Great Sea Serpent and Sperm Whale Conflict*.
31 Lee, *Sea Monsters Unmasked*, 423.
32 Paxton, 'Unleashing the Kraken'
33 Lee, *Sea Monsters Unmasked*.

Table 1 A comparison of different hypotheses for the morphology of the Drevar serpent

Feature (of 'serpent')	*Noted by Drevar*	*Giant snake or eel*	*Sperm whale and giant squid*	*Mating sperm whales*	*Hump back whales*	*Sperm whales with debris*	*Basilosaurus*
Serpentiform body	Yes	Yes	Yes (squid arms and tentacles)	Yes (penis)	Yes (flippers intertwined)	Yes (debris)	Yes?
Coils around whale body	Yes	Yes	Yes (arms/ tentacles)	No (flippers intertwined)	Yes	Yes	No
Countershaded	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Possibly	Yes?
Open mouth	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Apparent open mouth possibly	Yes
Eye	Yes (in sketch)	Yes	No (not on arms)	No	No	Apparent eye possibly	Yes
Cylindrical 'body' 40 ft in the air	Yes	No	Unlikely	Yes, misinterpreted penis?	Yes, misinterpreted flipper?	Yes	Yes

it to be *Architeuthis*. The sperm whale was large according to the witnesses which again would mean it was capable of tackling a large *Architeuthis*.[34] Alternatively, Lee suggested that the witnesses might have seen the 'amours of two whales' such that the serpent was actually the pectorals of the whales intertwined. Similarly, Adrian Shine suggests they were actually humpback whales mating with the fins overlapping and that because of the distance (half a mile) misidentified.[35] Paxton et al. suggested that the whales were mating and the serpent was in fact, a sperm whale penis(es) which can take on a light colour but are not countershaded.[36] The equator is a sperm whale breeding ground.[37] This would also explain the tail lashing the sea as a courtship display.[38] Mating behaviour might also explain why the whales were 'frantic with excitement'. France suggested it was a sperm whale entrapped in fishing gear or some other debris but this otherwise plausible hypothesis does not really explain the tail slapping nor necessarily the 'excitement' of the other whales.[39] A more exotic suggestion was made by Searles V. Wood in the pages of *Nature* that the sea serpent was a zeuglodon (*Basilosaurus*), an extinct elongate whale.[40] Wood corresponded with Drevar but Drevar was unconvinced, 'Capt. Drevar rejects with disdain my suggestion that the animal was not a serpent.'

More precisely Drevar seems to have believed the *Pauline* serpent was a literal giant sea snake of the Hydrophidae family.[41] The Hydrophidae are, of course, not

34 See Paxton, 'Unleashing the Kraken'.
35 Shine, pers. comm.
36 Paxton et al., 'Cetaceans, Sex and Sea Serpents'.
37 Whitehead, *Sperm Whales.*
38 Ibid.
39 France, 'Reinterpreting Nineteenth-century Accounts of Whales'.
40 Wood, 'Order Zeuglodontia, Owen'.
41 Drevar, *The Great Sea Serpent and Sperm Whale Conflict*.

constricting snakes but instead poisonous. No constricting serpent could successfully suffocate an animal like a sperm whale whose lungs can collapse. An animal that could stick a 60-foot neck out of the water would have to have a substantial mass of body within the water to prevent tipping over.

Table 1 compares Drevar's descriptions with given explanations. No single known explanation stands out as being comprehensive. Indeed, a giant snake or eel would fit best on purely morphological grounds if we assume Drevar's observations were accurate. However, the *Pauline* account cannot be taken at face value despite the multiple witnesses. The initial serpent was seen at a difference of half a (nautical?) mile, 926 metres, a not insubstantial distance allowing for considerable misinterpretation even through a spyglass. However, the second serpent was seen at 200 yards so the witnesses must have seen something quite unusual. Drevar's interpretation of what was seen must be wrong. An animal that could stick a 40- or 60-foot neck out of the water would have to have a substantial mass of body within the water to prevent the neck tipping over. It would also seem extraordinary that an animal as rare as a sea serpent if it existed, would be seen on three separate occasions by the same vessel. In addition to the inconsistency of the colour of the animal, Landells initially reckoned there were four or five whales, Drevar three. Landells subsequently signed the affidavit that there were three. Some later events, also cast doubt on Drevar's reliability as an eyewitness.

However, the zoological affinities of the sea serpent were of less importance to Drevar than the religious implications. These are made clear in his 1889 booklet where he again explicitly relates the sea serpent to the Leviathan of the book of Job (repeating Landells's comments above) dismissing any theologians who said the Leviathan was a whale. Drevar thought the existence of sea serpents was vindication of scripture and 'I sincerely believe that God for some wise purpose, has been pleased to reveal this greatest wonder of animated nature to me.'[42]

After the 'Pauline'

An interview with Drevar in 1888 by the *Australian Star* implies he retired from the sea for a short period after the *Pauline* but then later went to India to command and part-own the *Norfolk* (953 tons).[43] In May 1878 he wrote a letter to the *Commercial Gazette* detailing his capture of a striped sea serpent (presumably of the genus *Hydrophis*) off Singapore[44]. Drevar's sea snake specimen(s) would receive prominence later in his career so it is worth considering its (their) origins. Drevar says he had a collection of natural history specimens. In 1889 he states he had collected a serpent off Chittagong and two years later in the Java Sea.[45] The latter is clearly the Singapore specimen of 1878 so the Chittagong specimen must have been caught in 1876.[46] Drevar later caught another one off Cooktown, Australia in 1886 and sent another retrieved from the stomach of a shark to the Sydney museum in 1887.[47]

Then the *Norfolk* stranded. An indication of Drevar's priorities at this time was

42 *Nottingham Evening Post*, 26 Apr. 1881.
43 *Australian Star*, 23 Jan. 1888.
44 Reprinted in *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, 28 Sep. 1878.
45 Drevar, *The Great Sea Serpent and Sperm Whale Conflict*.
46 Ibid. and *London Evening Standard*, 14 Aug. 1883.
47 Drevar, *The Great Sea Serpent and Sperm Whale Conflict*

his 1889 revelation that he strove to save his specimen of sea serpent from the wreck by the expedient of taking some rum from another nearby wreck on the reef.[48]

The wreck investigation of September 1879 revealed the stranding was due to a combination of unfortunate events. Drevar had determined a course which took the boat straight onto the reef, rather than avoiding it, the ship's cargo of ground nuts somehow blocked the pumps and in order to man the pumps, the lookout was taken from his primary duty, leading to the boat colliding with the reef. The wreck commissioner Rothery clearly stated Drevar along with the second officer (who appeared to have had an alcohol problem) were responsible.[49] Drevar's captain's licence was suspended for six months.

It is clear that the outcome of the inquiry caused some considerable stress to Drevar and there must have been some now lost communication between him and Rothery where at some stage Drevar's encounter and belief in a sea serpent was debated.[50] Drevar's belief in the great sea serpent is not alluded to in the commissioner's report so it is unclear in what context and when Rothery had brought up the matter of the sea serpent. Rothery or the wreck commission bureaucracy had also kept the logbook which Drevar seemed to think would have actually absolved him of blame for the wreck of the *Norfolk.* Therefore, motivated by a sense of injustice, desirous of the return of his logbook and hurt by negative allusions to his belief in the sea serpent, Drevar started writing letters to Rothery, as well as the head of maritime affairs at the Board of Trade, Thomas Gray, and for good measure, the colonial secretary, the Earl of Kimberley. The connection of the Earl to the affair is unclear. All three were apparent threats. What was in the letters can only be gleaned from the newspaper reports. In the case of Rothery, the first letter was sent on 25 November 1879 but then he wrote another letter expressing regret seemingly having been advised of intervention by the authorities.[51] However, Drevar then sent more letters to Gray and Rothery on the 31 January 1880 calling Rothery 'an unfeeling brute,[52] and then another where he demanded 'recompense, employment or an asylum'and if his request was not granted, he would 'charge his blood and that of another on the nation that had so cruelly wronged him', and called Rothery a 'modern Jesuit.[53]

Eventually, the police intervened. Drevar (reported in contemporary newspapers as 'Drevor') was first arrested on 12 April 1881 and held on remand,[54] but then had the first hearing at Bow Street magistrates court on the 25th.[55] During his arrest (by Inspector Swanson of Scotland Yard, who would later lead the investigation into Jack the Ripper) he threatened to shoot Rothery while Rothery was sitting in court and then himself. [56] Drevar also bizarrely showed the arresting police a specimen of sea serpent preserved in spirit as well as some pamphlets about the sea serpent

48 Ibid.
49 Rothery, 'Norfolk', *Board of Trade Wreck Report,* 119-21.
50 *London Evening Standard*, 12 Apr. 1881 and *Globe* 28 Apr. 1881.
51 *Rutland Echo and Leicestershire Advertiser*, 14 May 1881.
52 Ibid.
53 *Nottingham Evening Post*, 26 Apr. 1881.
54 *London Evening Standard*, 12 Apr. 1881.
55 *The Times*, 26 Apr. 1881 and *Nottinghamshire Guardian,* 29 Apr. 1881.
56 Wood, *Swanson, The Life and Times of a Victorian Detective*.

presumably similar to his later booklet of 1889.[57] The provenance of the serpent was given as off South Africa or the Indian Ocean (which would not contradict the former).[58] It was caught in the 'act of swallowing a fish' according to a news report of April 1881.[59] This matches his Java Sea/Singapore specimen.

Drevar appears to have been initially charged with two different offences, making threats and libel (to Rothery and the Earl). He was judged to be a monomaniac by the prison doctor on his first arrest but regarded as sane by the time of his trial.[60]

When the 'Sea Serpent Monomaniac' finally came to full trial in May, he pleaded guilty to libel, the charge(s) of threatening behaviour apparently having been dropped for unknown reasons.[61] The defending barrister Mr Mead, admitted a variety of witnesses to Drevar's good character and by way of defence argued that it was Drevar's belief in the existence of the sea serpent and the incredulity with which it was received, the loss of the ship, his sense of injustice over the wreck report and his financial ruination which had led to 'his mind [becoming] temporarily unhinged'. The defence further argued that his intention with the letters was purely to gain publicity to his plight rather than actual intent to inflict harm. With regard to the sea serpent, the defence admitted that while he 'been suffering under a delusion respecting its existence but regards all other matters he was quite sane'.

In sentencing the accused Mr Justice Denman (who commented he had been at college with Rothery!) was sympathetic and accepted that Drevar was previously a person of high character but in threatening the commissioner, who had a 'kind and tender regard for those that came under his jurisdiction', Drevar really had to be punished. So Drevar was sent down for three months, fortunately without hard labour. He was bonded for £50 to leave Rothery alone and another £50 to keep the peace for 12 months.[62] The papers were sympathetic. The *Birmingham Mail* stated, 'we certainly think that pity and medical care would be more suited to his case than a sentence of three months imprisonment.'[63]

After prison

Details of Drevar's imprisonment are unknown, suffice it to say he was free the following year. However, Drevar's stint in prison did not seem to have immediately lessened his sense of grievance and he came dangerously close to legal trouble again by writing on 18 May 1882 an ill-advised letter to the president of the Board of Trade, Sir Joseph Chamberlain where he makes an implicit threat to end up in court again.[64]

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57 *Nottingham Evening Post*, 26 Apr. 1881.

58 *Nottinghamshire Guardian,* 29 Apr. 1881; *The Times*, 26 Apr. 1881.

59 *Nottinghamshire Guardian,* 29 Apr. 1881

60 *Rutland Echo and Leicestershire Advertiser*, 14 May 1881.

61 *Nottinghamshire Guardian,* 29 Apr. 1881.

62 The National Archives, Kew (hereafter TNA): MT 9/207/M12724/82, G. Drevar, Letter, 1882.

63 *Eastern Morning News*, 9 May 1881.

64 TNA: MT 9/207/M12724/82, G. Drevar, Letter, 1882. Punctuation as in the original, ? Indicates unreadable words and (?) indicates my best interpretation of the word.

Convalescent Home
Walton. Weybridge, Surrey

May 18 1882.

Right Hon. J. Chamberlain
President of the Board of Trade

Sir,
I have been three months in prison and I kept the peace for twelve months as ordered, Thanks to the low, mean contemptable, cunning of Counsel for prosecution and defence I had no trial, The Former taking(?) me with insanity, and the latter pleading guilty, in spite of my instructions and pleading not guilty the day previously in court, I am now one of the most friendless and destitute men in this country, my life ?, my spirit alone unbroken, and I shall never rest while at liberty until I find out why Mr Rothery is allowed to wrong, grossly insult and suspend me for six months while a few months afterwards he highly commends the master of the Hemidall who broke the law respecting shifting boards before he left port, was liable to a heavy fine for so doing, and lost his vessel in consequence of the cargo shifting That vessel was well insured, and the master retained in employment,

I have the printed report(?) of the "Norfolk" investigation with me, and I find the conclusions arrived at by the Commissioner as absurd as his statement that thirty fathoms was the proper(?) ? for tracking(?) a large ship in the English Channel in a fog,

I also find in the report several false statements, first he does not know as to sums for which the [word missing in original] was insured Mr Handton(?) who was owner of the vessel most of the time I was in her, who gave me the command and knew the vessels circumstances, said in court that the vessel was not insured, The Commissioner told him point blanc (sic) he did not believe him, I could also have told him, but did not do so, after that insult to my friend

Secondly seeing that we do not know by whom the enquiry of the longitude was made, and that we have no other evidence on this point, The prosecuting counsel Mr Potter told the court that the figures were those of an Italian or a Frenchman, the Mate was an Italian. And the court had my chart with the position of the ship marked correctly on it, and corresponding with the longitude marked in the log book, Thirdly report says , we are told and the master has not denied it, that three days before the master himself had ordered the second officer to go to the ? and ? the lookout more also, I told Mr Rothery that the log book signed by the witnesses and all of the crew disposed that, as it is there stated all the officers were told that day to keep a good look out for the land, The Commissioner then said it was a cooked up article, and the fact of having all my crew to sign it showed it was so

The report says that the entries in the log book, are of a very suspicious character, this however is not a matter for which this court has any power to punish him. If this is not insult to injury, I do not know what is. All that can be said about the loss of the vessel, is that she was lost through the wilful neglect of

the second officer disobeying my last orders to him, And for which I declined to give him a character before he appeared in court, The log book was impounded, and I never could get it although it belonged to me, and provided all things pertaining to the navigation of that vessel,

I now ask that the you would kindly interfere in this matter, Otherwise as the likely(?) course(?) I know is to send printed copies of the letter to some members of parliament and other grandies(?), If all fails I shall be able to tell the courts(?) when next before it, that I used all lawful means to obtain redress, for some of the bitterest(?) wrongs, that an honest, upright, man ever received in this or any other country And although I may end my life in prison and be sacrificed again I will never cease trying(?) for redress. I leave here on the 25 for the 78 Mell street, Oxford street.

I remain Sir
Your obedient servant

George Drevar.

The letter made its way to the marine department of the Board of Trade where a memorandum was written by an official who commented, 'Mr Drevar having come out of prison & having kept the peace for 12 months now thinks he is at liberty to abuse Counsel for defence & prosecution at his recent trial.'[65] Another comment queried whether he should be allowed to keep his captain's license which presumably had been restored to him.

Drevar was clearly (mentally?) ill at this point. His address in the letter is a convalescent home and an article in *Leisure Hour* the same year describes him as ill.[66] Nevertheless, he demonstrated his sea serpent in talks in London and Brighton.

By 1883 Drevar seems to have recovered somewhat and he attended the Great Fisheries Exhibition held in London in order to demonstrate some lifesaving gear he had invented, as well as displaying his sea snake.[67] It would be difficult to believe he would not have known of zoologist's Henry Lee's participation and sceptical presentation on sea serpents with its giant squid explanation for the initial *Pauline* sighting.[68] No record of any meeting is known but they did correspond at this time.[69]

By August 1883 an unabashed Drevar was writing letters to the London *Evening Standard* arguing for the existence of the sea serpent mentioning his capture of one from the Java Sea.[70]

Emigration to Australia

In August 1884 Drevar and his wife Caroline Ann Drevar travelled as passengers from London to Brisbane.[71] This voyage onboard the boat *Dorunda*, appears to be mired in controversy because there was a paucity of freshwater between Gravesend and Malta.

65 TNA: MT 9/207/M12724/82, Memorandum M1724, 1882.
66 Anon., 'Water Velocipede', 637
67 Drevar, *The Great Sea Serpent and Sperm Whale Conflict*.
68 Lee, *Sea Monsters Unmasked.*
69 Ibid, 423.
70 *London Evening Standard*, 14 Aug. 1883.
71 It is not known when they married.

Drevar brought a private suit against the captain, A. R. Sayers for being in breach of the Passenger's Act. Although Drewar's complaint was corroborated by another passenger, it was refuted by the ship's doctor. The defendant's lawyer suggested Drevar's suit was motivated by some grievance about the cost of passage. The case was ultimately dismissed. The police magistrate was quoted as saying it was 'completely monstrous that people should bring such cases before the bench'.[72] Drevar wrote a subsequent letter to the Brisbane *Telegraph* where he attempted to justify his suit.[73]

In 1885 Drevar was writing letters from Mackay, Queensland, to local newspapers about the sea serpent. He also tried his hand at poetry and penned some verses about the sinking of the *Margaret* in 1855 published in the *Mackay Mercury and South Kennedy Advertiser.*[74] He then appears to have travelled on the *Dorunda* again, as a letter in the *Brisbane Courier* gives his description of monster oyster shells on the 'last homeward trip' from Cooktown, Queensland to London for delivery to the Colonial and Indian exhibition in 1886.[75] Presumably Drevar took only part passage to some other Australian port as in July he was in a boat off Cooktown harbour where he caught a sea snake alive and then on 30 July he participated in the search for a wrecked ship.[76]

He then seems to have made his way, along on with his wife, to Sydney, Australia, arriving in December 1887. En route on the steamer *Barcoo,* a large tiger shark was taken and apparently dissected onboard. It contained her pups and some sea snakes which Drevar managed to keep alive for a short time afterwards. In Sydney he was interviewed by the *Australian Star* in 1888 where he gave a detailed, albeit incomplete, account of his life.[77]

Some time in 1888–9 Drevar became skipper of the *Saucy Lass* which made a trip from Sydney to the Solomon Islands in July before returning as a passenger on the *Edith May* in September. Interesting light is shed on Drevar's reliability as a witness in a correspondence in the *Australian Star* in 1889. The *Saucy Lass* arrived in the Solomons after a massacre of some settlers[78]. Drevar shed some light on the events of the attack after hearing an account from another merchant captain in addition to calling for intervention by the New South Wales authorities. He then spent two 'very pleasant' weeks paddling around the islands in a self-made canoe prior to getting passage to Australia on the *Edith May.* A subsequent correspondent Hubert Jessop attacked the accuracy of the piece and declared, presumably without irony, not knowing Drevar's history, 'I would say his geographical description is very far from right, and, I am afraid, were his calculations at sea one quarter so incorrect he would soon find himself a subject for a Marine Board Enquiry.'[79] However, Jessop's actual corrections to Drevar's account seem quite minor given Drevar himself was recounting the events second-hand.

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72 *Brisbane Courier*, 29 Oct. 1884.
73 *Telegraph,* 30 Oct. 1884.
74 *Mackay Mercury and South Kennedy Advertiser* 14 Oct. 1885.
75 *Brisbane Courier,* 20 Feb. 1886.
76 *Maryborough Chronicle, Wide Bay and Burnett Advertiser,* 29 Jul. 1886; *Brisbane Courier,* 31 Jul. 1886.
77 *Australian Star*, 23 Jan. 1888.
78 *Sydney Morning Herald,* 9 Sep. 1889 and *Australian Star*, 11 Sep. 1889.
79 *Australian Star,* 26 Sep. 1889.

In 1889 Drevar published a booklet on the sea serpent possibly a reprint of the 'pamphlets' he showed the police when arrested in 1881. There is evidence that he still believed he had been treated unfairly in 1879, 'I was robbed, wronged and grossly insulted' and 'I made a desperate effort to drag the wrongs to right but failed. I hope some day to say more on the subject' which presumably alludes to the criminal case which is otherwise not mentioned. This was Drevar's last publication on the sea serpent as he died in 1890.[80] He received a flattering obituary in the *Australian Star* (mainly based on the earlier *Australian Star* article of his previous travels) which did not mention his conviction of 1881 or his obsession with sea serpents.[81]

Discussion

It is perhaps surprising that the life of so colourful a Victorian character as Drevar is not known. Drevar's sea serpent accounts are regarded as classic encounters in marine cryptozoological literature and were well publicized at the time, but his subsequent conviction and obsession with sea snakes seem never to have been mentioned, since 1881.[82]

Few of the newspapers actually directly connected the Drevor of the Old Bailey trial to the Drevar of the *Pauline* but despite that, the *Pauline* incident seems to have cropped up during the trial. There is no evidence that the trial particularly changed attitudes of newspapers to sea serpents. Sightings continued to be reported in major newspapers but figurative references to sea serpents would often be negative as either tall stories or a simile for the unlikely[83].

What does Drevar's biography say about his reliability as a witness? Was Drevar the 'hard headed scotchman' of *The Times*? The fervent Christian who believed his sighting was a vindication of the Leviathan of the bible? Or the unstable individual who issued death threats in 1879–80? The dishonest rogue or genuinely aggrieved passenger who brought the (frivolous?) suit against the captain of the *Dorunda* in 1884? Or the storyteller of 1886–9, whose recollections are at slight variance with other contemporary accounts of the extraordinary events of his life but perhaps no more so than might be expected than the vagaries of memory? His judgement from 1880 to 1881, was clearly impaired but does that mean he was an unreliable witness in 1875? Testimony, agreed by multiple witnesses, was signed in front of a magistrate in 1877. However, those witnesses may have been unduly influenced by their captain. It is noteworthy that Landell's religious commentary is very similar to that of Drevar in his Indian newspaper article of 1877 and in his pamphlet of 1889. Landells also altered his opinion as to the number of whales to that of Drevar's. Despite multiple accounts, multiple witnesses and multiple explanations, it remains still unclear what was actually seen by the crew of the *Pauline.*

What we can be sure of was the effect on Drevar, perhaps because of prior religious beliefs, he become obsessed and that obsession coupled with the misfortune of shipwreck sent him to the Old Bailey. The *Eastern Morning News* summarized the case thus, 'Captain Drevor was an able man of excellent character, who had many successful voyages until he went wrong on sea-serpents . . . he was a religious man;

80 *Evening News,* 3 Jan. 1890.
81 *Australian Star,* 6 Jan. 1890; *Australian Star,* 23 Jan. 1888.
82 For example, Heuvelmans *In the Wake of the Sea-serpents*.
83 For example, *The Times*, 17 Oct. 1883, 20 May 1884 and 11 Dec. 1897.

but once his religion got mixed up with sea serpents there was no chance for him.'[84]

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84 *Eastern Morning News*. 9 May 1881.